



Patsy Barrett (1930-1995), founder of the Governor's Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities Awards, was a tenacious disability advocate. Her work contributed to the foundation of national disability policy, and the subsequent implementation of these laws in Louisiana.

In speaking to family and friends, it became obvious that it would be difficult to capture her larger-than-life personality. Patsy's firecracker spirit was apparent to all who encountered her.

Patsy was a woman who turned any obstacle into a challenge. In adulthood, she contracted a polio-like illness resulting in quadriplegia. She used these events to fuel her work in disability advocacy. While discussing her disability with Louisiana Public Broadcasting<sup>1</sup>, she firmly stated, "I either had to learn to live with it, or die. So I learned to live with it."

Most notably in her advocacy career, Patsy hosted a public forum in New Orleans in 1988 that gave input for the original language of the Americans With

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ladigitalmedia.org/video\\_v2/asset-detail/LFOLK-121](http://ladigitalmedia.org/video_v2/asset-detail/LFOLK-121)

Disabilities Act<sup>2</sup>. The Americans With Disabilities Act provides legal protection for people with disabilities from discrimination and was finally signed into law in 1990.

Patsy participated in Operation People First<sup>3</sup> of 1994, which was created by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. The purpose of the project was to bring "all of the American people, including people with disabilities, into the decision-making process of government and that of putting people first." There, Patsy participated in identifying key issues in the disability community which later helped shape national public policy.

Patsy's daughter-in-law, Collette Barrett, remembered her as having a "joyfulness of spirit that emanated from within". There were many facets to Patsy's strength including her deep Catholic faith and work in women's rights activism.

Patsy Barrett was a truly force to be reckoned with. By channeling her personal experience into passionate advocacy, she not only helped pave the way for people with disabilities in Louisiana, but for people with disabilities across the country.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://dolearchivecollections.ku.edu/collections/ada/files/s-leg\\_761\\_006\\_all.pdf](http://dolearchivecollections.ku.edu/collections/ada/files/s-leg_761_006_all.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=sEO3Qwg4FfwC&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP4>